

Congress is poised to pass the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) authorizing up to \$50 billion in unconstitutional foreign aid. The bill passed out of the Foreign Affairs Committee with a bipartisan agreement to nearly double the President's requested amount. It is always distressing to see officials in our government reach across the aisle to disregard Constitutional limitations. Much of this aid will run through government-to-government channels and will be vulnerable to corruption. Some of the aid will be sent to faith-based organizations who, along with accepting government largess, will now be subject to governmental controls and will soon become more dependent on taxpayer funding than private funds. If they accept the aid, they must be careful of the vague language regarding what types of programs they can run. For example, the requirement that 33% of any funding received must go toward abstinence-only programs has been dropped and replaced with a 50% requirement toward behavior change. Many humanitarian organizations are incensed by the politicized requirements placed on their work, and feel they are being forced to continue failed programs at the expense of more effective ones. The obvious question remains: Why are politicians in the United States deciding what is best for people in Africa? And why are taxpayers in the United States being forced to fund—for example - family planning facilities that perform abortions? In fact, Afrobarometer, a leading source of data on public attitudes in Africa asked Africans what their main developmental concerns were. They found that Africans are much more concerned about jobs, agriculture and basic infrastructure than they are about health issues like AIDS. Africans should decide what is best for Africa. American taxpayers should decide what charities deserve their money. Forcibly taking money from the United States and sending it overseas is unconstitutional and immoral. The energy that lobbying groups and celebrities expend for charitable causes here on the Hill could be better put to use actually addressing problems. It is sadly symptomatic of the trend toward bigger government that instead of private fundraising efforts, people put their hand out to Congress. It is unfortunate that some activists prefer funding taken by force, to donations freely given. These efforts, though well-meaning, are misguided. The truth is all the foreign aid in the world will not transform Africa into a thriving, healthy continent. The economic growth of Africa depends on African entrepreneurs, liberalized trade policies, and political and economic freedom. The best thing we could possibly do for Africa and for our own country, is to stop sending misguided aid, and stop protectionist trade practices that prevent African farmers and producers from competing in our markets. Perhaps then Africa's leaders would focus less on how to get aid out of the United States, and more on the economic vitality of their own countries.